Meeting of the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC) countries in June, 2003, has progressed during the last seventeen months;

(b) if so, the status thereof;

(c) the estimated schedule of completion of the study;

(d) the estimated schedule of completion of pre-feasibility study for the proposed rail project; and

(e) the salient features of the proposed rail link along with details of benefits expected to accrue to the people of the countries when so linked?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) and (b) Yes. As a first step, RITES Ltd. have been asked to carry out a feasibility study of the missing rail links between India and Myanmar. RITES Ltd. have completed the field study on the Myanmar side and are currently engaged in the field studies on the Indian side.

(c) and (d) The feasibility study being undertaken by RITES Ltd. is expected to be completed by January 2005.

(e) The salient features of the proposed rail link are laying of missing links and restoration/upgradation of existing links. Rail connectivity is expected to promote intra-regional trade, foster economic and social integration, facilitate movement of goods and enhance people to people contacts. This would be of particular benefit to the eastern and north-east regions of India.

Indian fishermen in Pak custody

2282 SHRI NANDI YELLAIAH: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the details of Indian fishermen strayed across *de-facto* Pakistan Maritime Borders as on date and still not freed from Pakistan Jails, State-wise;

(b) the details of steps taken and proposed to be taken by Government to free them from Pakistan jails; and

(c) the details of steps taken by Government to prevent such straying of innocent Indian fishermen across *de-facto* Pakistan Maritime Borders?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) As per latest information, the total number of Indian fishermen in Pakistan's custody is approximately 900. Most of the fishermen belong to Gujarat, Diu, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh.

(b) Government of India is in constant touch with Pakistan Government through diplomatic channels for early release of all the Indian fishermen in Pakistani jails. Pakistan Government has granted consular access to 266 Indian fishermen. Pakistan Government has recently conveyed its agreement to release these fishermen. Government is trying for early consular access for the remaining Indian fishermen.

(c) The issue of release and repartriation of the apprehended fishermen has been taken up with the Pakistan Government at various high-level meetings such as that of Prime Minister, Foreign Minister and Foreign Secretary. Steps have also been taken at the local level to sensitize the fishermen on the issue.

Extradition of Iqbal Mirchi

2283. SHRI K. RAMA MOHANA RAO: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the drug lord, Iqbal Mirchi, who is wanted in many crimes in India, was traced down in Illinois, USA by the federal Agency of USA;

(b) if so, what moves Government are making to extradite him to India; and

(c) how the Ministry is co-ordinating with the Federal Agency of USA to extradite Mirchi to India?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) No Sir.

(b) and (c) Does not arise.